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ABSTRACT

During the 1930s, the "Atlanta World" was the nation's only black-owned daily newspaper. For a generation, the glamour of writing for the "World" attracted young journalists who aspired to edit or write for a daily. Beyond that, the "World" was the powerhouse of its own syndicate of 50 black-owned semi-weeklies and weeklies west to Iowa and north to Ohio. Legendary among the journalists whose careers in the black press started at the "World" was Frank Marshall Davis, later esteemed as a poet of black protest. As managing editor of the "World," he helped establish and maintain the daily edition, which began in March 1932. From 1931-34, Marshall made the gatekeeper decisions concerning news coverage and articulated the "World's" editorial voice, expressing what he called social realism on behalf of social, political and economic justice for blacks. (Fifty-five notes are included.) (Author)

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The Voice of the World: The Early Career of Frank Marshall Davis, 1931-34

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ABSTRACT

The Voice of the World: The Early Career
of Frank Marshall Davis, 1931-34

During the 1930s, the Atlanta World was the nation's only black-owned daily newspaper. For a generation, the glamour of writing for the World attracted young journalists who aspired to edit or write for a daily. Beyond that, the World was the powerhouse of its own syndicate of 50 black-owned semi-weeklies and weeklies west to Iowa and north to Ohio.

Legendary among the journalists whose careers in the black press started at the World was Frank Marshall Davis, later esteemed as a poet of black protest. As managing editor of the World, he helped establish and maintain the daily edition, which began in March 1932. From 1931-34, Marshall made the gatekeeper decisions concerning news coverage articulated the World's editorial voice, expressing what he called social realism on behalf of social, political and economic justice for blacks.

The Voice of the World: The Early Career of Frank Marshall Davis, 1931-34

During the 1930s, the Atlanta World was the nation's only black-owned daily newspaper. For a generation, the glamour of writing for the World attracted young blacks, particularly those already in the South, who aspired to work for a daily newspaper. Beyond that, there was the excitement of knowing that the World's influence was extended through its own syndicate across the South and Midwest. In the early 1930s, despite the Depression, the Scott Newspaper Syndicate grew to include 50 black-owned semi-weeklies and weeklies in cities reached from Atlanta by the railroad lines radiating west to Iowa and north to Ohio. Stories published in the Atlanta World were circulated in a national edition inserted in all papers in syndicate.[1]

Among the journalists whose careers in the black press were advanced at the World, one of the most legendary was Frank Marshall Davis (1905-1987). In the early 1930s, when blacks were migrating by the thousands from the Jim Crow South to the cities of the North and Midwest, Davis went against the

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[1]The Southern Newspaper Syndicate was renamed the Scott Newspaper Syndicate in 1933 after non-Southern publishers joined. By 1933 the syndicate's letterhead advertised 50 newspapers, including a Creek Indian weekly in Oklahoma, the Okmulgee Voice of Nation. Among the 50 were four semi-weeklies, the St. Louis World and the Texas World in Highland Park, and two owned by Scott, the Birmingham World and the Memphis World. The other 46 papers were weeklies, published in Little Rock, Asheville, Athens (Ga.), Austin, Brunswick (Ga.), Charlotte, Kingston (N.C.), Wilmington (N.C.), Chattanooga, Cincinnati, Clarksdale (Miss.), Cleveland, Columbia (S.C.), Columbus (Ohio), Detroit, Durham (N.C.), Danville (Va.), Evanston (Ill.), Fort Worth, Gadsden (Ala.), Hopkinsville (Ky.), Hannibal (Mo.), Huntington (W.Va.), Des Moines, Jackson (Tenn.), Jacksonville (Fla.), Lexington (Ky.), Reidsville (N.C.), New Orleans, Shreveport, Miami, Mobile, Montgomery, Nashville, New Bern (N.C.), St. Petersburg, Florence (S.C.), Richmond (Ky.), Roanoke, Spartanburg (S.C.), Frogmore (S.C.), Tampa, Greensboro (N.C.), Tuscaloosa (Ala.) and West Palm Beach.

trend, moving from the Midwest to seek opportunity in the Deep South. He began as managing editor of the syndicated semi-weekly World in 1931, at the age of 25; a year later, he helped expand the paper into a daily, starting on March 1932. From 1931 to 1934, Marshall made the major gatekeeping decisions concerning news coverage and editorial focus. For three years, he personally articulated the World's editorial voice--outspoken in advocacy of social, political and economic justice. Davis' voice in editorials, as later in four books of poetry, was an appeal for social realism.

Davis' views--militant in the context of the South's Jim Crow segregation--were reflected in his free verse, some of which he wrote at the World. Fifty years later, Davis told an interviewer, "My poetry was often triggered by my experiences as a journalist. When I was in Atlanta, I wrote poetry and filed it away. As a social realist, I had to be influenced by my experiences as a newsman."[2] Within two years of leaving Atlanta in 1934, Davis became managing editor of the Associated Negro Press in Chicago and was soon recognized as a nationally esteemed poet of social protest. His books of poems in the 1930s were "almost unprecedented for a black writer during the Depression," notes biographer John Edgar Tidwell. "There had to be something going on there that makes him really important for his era."[3]

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[2]John Edgar Tidwell, "An Interview with Frank Marshall Davis," Black American Literature Forum, 19 (Fall 1985): 108. The interview was conducted by mailed questionnaires July 29, 1982 and May 27, 1983.

[3]Interview by telephone with John Edgar Tidwell, June 30, 1989.

This research paper examines Davis' signed opinion columns and the positions he articulated in editorials during his formative three years at the World from 1931-1934.[4]

Davis' editorials were uncharacteristically strident for a black editor in the Deep South. The Ku Klux Klan, lynchings and terrorism--provably more terrible in the South than in anywhere in the United States--were normally effective mutes to black protest. Being an outsider, not born and reared in the culture of the Deep South, Davis' rebellious nature was less inhibited. Beyond that, he had professional preparation at Kansas State Agricultural College, where he was trained in journalism and introduced to experimental free verse. Afterwards he was drawn to Chicago where,

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[4]For Davis' literary achievements, see Tidwell, "Davis" in Afro-American Writers, vol. 51 of Dictionary of Literary Biography: 60, 63-64. The year after leaving the World in 1934, Davis published his first volume of poetry, Black Man's Verse (Chicago: Black Cat Press, 1935). This gained him a grant from the Julius Rosenwald Foundation in 1937. Soon after, he published a second volume, I Am the American Negro (Chicago: Black Cat Press, 1937), followed by a special limited edition Christmas volume of four poems, Through Sepia Eyes (Chicago: Black Cat Press, 1938). His last book of poetry, including his Chicago poems, was 47th Street: Poems (Prairie City, Ill.: Decker Press, 1948).

See also Arthur P. Davis, From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers, 1900-1960 (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974), pp. 120-125; Abby Arthur Johnson and Ronald Maberry Johnson, Propaganda and Aesthetics: The Literary Politics of Afro-American Magazines in the Twentieth Century (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), pp. 43, 112, 116, 118, 133-34, 142, 152, 154-55; Dudley Randall, "An Interview with Frank Marshall Davis," Black World, 23, n. 3 (1974): 37-48; and Benjamin Brawley, The Negro Genius: A New Appraisal of the Achievement of the American Negro in Literature and the Fine Arts (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1966), pp. 266-67.

For Davis' journalistic achievements after leaving the World, see Lawrence D. Hogan, A Black National News Service: The Associated Negro Press and Claude Barnett, 1919-1945 (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1984), pp. 65-66, 88, 129 (photo), 148, 206, 209.

while writing articles and short stories, made a living selling to black newspapers in the Chicago area.[5]

In Davis' Chicago and in other cities outside the South, the protest movement was growing and was reflected in the urban black press. Various forces encouraged and channeled protest against the system. The NAACP was gathering force, labor organizations were building strength, the Communist Party of the United States won some allegiance for its legal defense of the Scottsboro boys, and beginning in 1933, Roosevelt's New Deal offered some promise from Washington.

In the black press, the emphasis and agenda of protest depended on where the newspaper was published. Chicago's Robert S. Abbott, publisher of the most influential national weekly, the Chicago Defender, listed his concerns on the masthead, putting the NAACP's campaign for a federal anti-lynching law farther down on the list than his own agenda for economic justice--union jobs for blacks. Abbott daily spelled out his nine-point "Platform for America," starting with "the opening up of all trades and trade unions to blacks as well as whites."[6] Abbott also trusted that the

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[5]John Edgar Tidwell [Miami University, Ohio], "Frank Marshall Davis (31 December 1905-26 July 1987)," in Afro-American Writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1940, vol. 51 of Dictionary of Literary Biography, ed. by Trudier Harris (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1987): 60-61. In 1927-31, Davis worked for the Chicago Evening Bulletin, the Whip and the Gary American.

[6]Chicago Defender, Dec. 26, 1931, p. 11. The other eight points were (2) Representation in the president's cabinet, (3) Engineers and firemen on all American railroads and government controlled industries, (4) Representation in all departments of the police forces over the entire United States, (5) Government schools open to all American citizens in preference to foreigners, (6) Conductors on all railroads throughout the United States, (7) Motormen and conductors on surface, elevated and motorbus lines throughout America, (8) Federal legislation to abolish lynching, and (9) Full enfranchisement of all American citizens.

spiritual power of Christianity could transform racial prejudice. He crusaded for 20 years for a mere "exchange of pulpits" between black and white ministers in the belief that the "whole national racial psychology of America could be changed in a day were the Christian church to turn loose its blasting guns" against prejudice. Yet he questioned how the church could speak of a "brotherhood of men when it is silent on lynching; when it promotes discrimination, before the very altar of God, among the worshipers."[7]

Editors outside the South regularly deplored the excesses of racism, particularly the horrors of lynching. Some editors advocated the Southern blacks' cause more ardently because they or their publishers were from the South. The founder of the Pittsburgh Courier, which had thousands of subscribers in the South, was Edwin S. Harleston, a native of Charleston.[8] When in 1933 Georgia Gov. Eugene Talmadge postured himself as a friend of oppressed Jews in Nazi Germany, the Courier mocked him as a hypocrite--"the Governor of the Cracker State whose citizens lynched Leo Frank and have dispatched hundreds of Negro citizens without benefit of law or clergy...."[9] Citing the increasing number of lynchings in 1933 as "conclusive proof that many Southern communities have not progressed beyond the savage state," the Courier urged New Dealers to pass a federal law against lynching. The "whole race would be tremendously heartened and encouraged, and really feel that it

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[7]Robert S. Abbott, "Editor Lauds Idea of Changing Pulpits; Encourages Members to Exchange Pews," Chicago Defender, Feb. 10, 1934, p. 2.

[8]Theodore Hemmingway, "South Carolina," in The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979, ed. by Henry Lewis Suggs (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 293, 302.

[9]"A Strange Plea from Georgia," Pittsburgh Courier, Sept. 30, 1933, p. 10.

was experiencing a New Deal, if President Roosevelt would order as ruthless a campaign against the lynchers of Negroes as he has against the kidnapers of white people."[10]

The mood of protest in the early 1930s was such that some editors welcomed even the efforts of the Communist Party. At the end of 1931, Carl Murphy's influential Baltimore Afro-American applauded the "Communist program of racial equality" as a hopeful balance to the year's deplorable events--"fifteen lynchings" and the death sentences given to eight black youths in the Scottsboro, Ala., rape trial.[11] The editors welcomed the Communists as neo-abolitionists: "Reds as courageous as the Minute Men or the volunteer firemen seem everywhere ready for a demonstration against race prejudice, whether it be at hand or a thousand miles away."[12]

Alliance with the Communist Party, even from a distance, was too radical for some black editors, among them Frank Marshall Davis. While he was as ardent as any editor against injustices--in jobs, housing, education, the law---Davis warned against reliance upon a non-American system for solving American problems. In 1932, a year after becoming managing editor of the Atlanta World, Davis was invited to a national symposium of prominent black editors, including Murphy of the Afro-American and Robert S. Vann of the Courier. There, he warned against reliance on the Communist system to achieve racial justice. To Davis, the black protest movement was not compatible with the communists' "crude and noisy militancy." He saw "no fear

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[10]"Two More Lynchings," Pittsburgh Courier, Oct. 7, 1933, p. 10.

[11]"1931 Balance Sheet," The [Baltimore] Afro-American, Jan. 2, 1933, p. 5.

[12]"The Ready Reds," The [Baltimore] Afro-American, May 9, 1931, p. 5.

of the rainbow brotherhood going Red in wholesale numbers--at least not until white America takes long steps in that direction."[13]

When Davis arrived in Atlanta in 1931, the World was a youngster in the black press, barely three years old. The entire World enterprise--the syndicate and the daily edition--began in August 1928 with the founding of the weekly Atlanta World. The founder, William Alexander Scott II, a graduate of Atlanta's Morehouse College and a successful publisher of city directories for black businesses, envisioned a market for a black daily to be financed by black and white advertisers seeking to reach a black audience. Scott's success surprised everyone, including his own banker. The newspaper expanded to twice a week, three times a week, then daily; it thrived in the depths of the Depression. When employers were discharging employees, the World and the Scott Newspaper Syndicate created jobs on the syndicate staffs and in the 24-hour-a-day Atlanta plant.[14] "Everyone wanted to come to work for the Atlanta Daily World," recalls Cornelius A. Scott, the publisher since 1934 who, at 81, still goes to work daily. "All over the country, everybody was looking forward to working for a daily paper--a paper founded, produced, owned and controlled by black people."[15]

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[13]"Negro Editors on Communism: A Symposium of the American Negro Press," Crisis [NAACP], April and May 1932, in Voices of a Black Nation: Political Journalism in the Harlem Renaissance, ed. by Theodore G. Vincent (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1973), pp. 206-07. On the symposium with Davis were Carl Murphy of the The [Baltimore] Afro-American, P. B. Young of the Norfolk Journal and Guide, E. Washington Rhodes of the Philadelphia Tribune, Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier and Roscoe Dunjee of the Oklahoma Black Dispatch.

[14]A fuller treatment of W. A. Scott (1902-1934) and his founding of the Scott newspaper enterprise is found in Leonard Ray Teel, "W. A. Scott and the Founding of the Atlanta World," American Journalism, VI, n. 3 (July 1989).

[15]Interview with Cornelius A. Scott, Atlanta World office, Feb. 2, 1989.

During the generation when the World was the only black-owned daily, from 1932-1956,[16] its newsroom employed a succession of talented college graduates who went on to lifelong careers in the black press. The late Ric Roberts was on the staff which published the first weekly World in 1928; he later joined the Pittsburgh Courier, where he became a popular columnist. The late Robert M. Ratcliff, the World's early news editor responsible for packaging the national edition, also transferred to the Courier, where he propagated Scott's concept of syndication. From Morehouse College, Robert E. Johnson worked up to become the World's city editor before joining Jet magazine, where today he is associate editor. Another Morehouse graduate, Lerone Bennett, followed Johnson as city editor of the World and is now executive editor of Ebony magazine and author of nine books on black history.[17] Perhaps the most legendary alumnus of the World, however, is Frank Marshall Davis.

Frank Marshall Davis came to the World in February 1931, one month after Scott had launched his syndicate. The World was then published three times a week, and Scott, at the age of 28 years old, recruited Davis to help launch his dream of a daily newspaper. Davis himself was only 25 years old, a chain smoker with the countenance of a prize fighter, a "big scamp," as he called himself.[18] Born in Arkansas City, in south-central Kansas, he had

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[16]The Chicago Defender, an influential weekly, joined the ranks of black dailies in 1956.

[17]Interview with Robert E. Johnson, by telephone, March 30, 1989.

[18]Frank Marshall Davis, "Touring the World," Atlanta World, Feb. 17, 1932, p. 6. In the first year he shaved his mustache: "the depression got [my] mustache," he told readers.

studied journalism for two and a half years at Kansas State Agricultural College in Manhattan, and had moved to Chicago. His first newspaper job in the black press was with the Chicago Evening Bulletin, after which he worked for the Chicago Whip. When Scott recruited him, Davis was working for the Gary American in nearby Gary, Ind.

The World proposition was doubly attractive. Clearly the concept of a black-owned daily intrigued Davis. A year later, when the daily was finally launched, Davis proclaimed in a front-page editorial that this "first edition of the only daily newspaper published anywhere in the world by Negroes...marked still another epoch in this race's journalistic endeavors....the supreme achievement of Negro journalism--a daily newspaper."[19]

Davis was also attracted to Scott's already working concept of a syndicate, an independent partnership of black newspaper publishers across the South and beyond.[20] The syndicate amplified the voice of the World like a bullhorn--an intoxicating notion for a young black journalist with an agenda for "social realism." Views expressed in the World and shipped out in the national edition would be inserted into syndicate papers, increasing the total market circulation to at least 70,000 a week.[21] In the early 1930s,

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[19]Frank Marshall Davis, "Your World Now Daily," Atlanta World, March 14, 1932, p. 1.

[20]W. A. Scott to Mrs. Lucille [sic] Scott, April 26, 1932. Scott Family Papers, Atlanta Daily World, Atlanta, Ga. Geographically, the coverage at first was limited to nine Southern states from North Carolina to Arkansas. The syndicate member states in April 1932 included North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas and Louisiana.

[21]Vishnu V. Oak, The Negro Newspaper (Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1948), p. 86.

this nearly matched the circulation of the nation's most influential black-owned weekly, the Chicago Defender.[22]

Confident of his authority and reach, Davis' editorial voice was strident, pitched uncompromisingly toward his black audience. "Our bias was naturally in favor of blacks," he reflected 40 years later, "and so therefore, what we did was to serve in so many instances to give an entirely different side to the picture which first appeared in the white daily newspapers."[23]

Davis' authority at the World was underscored by the strict division of responsibilities assigned by W. A. Scott. Scott, the visionary and supersalesman, was preoccupied with extending the syndicate and expanding the advertising base. Davis was trusted to direct news coverage and editorials. Scott's young brother Cornelius ran the printing operation. When the daily was launched in 1932, Cornelius Scott was a 24-year-old printer working the flatbed presses. His recollections give a picture of the frenzy and complexity of the operation during the heyday of the syndicate when pressmen worked around the clock in the plant on Auburn Avenue. One of the key tasks was to change mastheads for

> our common news...all over the country, all kinds of news, ads. We'd put in that news, tear off the masthead and we'd change the paper over in 30 minutes. Change the masthead--Memphis World, Birmingham World. I'm surprised we didn't put the wrong masthead on the wrong paper. We ran things upside down sometimes, though, this thing was put out so fast. The press ran about 3,800 an hour. It'd take about two hours to run about 5,000 to Memphis.[24]

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[22]During most of the 1920s, the Defender's circulation ranged from 100,000 to 150,000. But in the early 1930s, circulation fell to about 70,000, mainly because of increased competition from the Courier and the Baltimore Afro-American, and ineffective management. Hogan, Black National News Service, p. 197.

[23]Hogan, Black National News Service, p. 209.

[24]Interview with C. A. Scott, Feb. 2, 1989.

The frenetic pace of the daily and the syndicate seemed to thrill Davis. In launching the daily, he communicated his pride that the World had "pioneered as a newspaper" and "has made itself an economic bulwark in Atlanta." He brimmed with admiration for W. A. Scott, "a man who entered the newspaper field with neither money nor knowledge of the game. All he had was the will to succeed and a generous supply of common sense."[25] Whatever Scott lacked in newspapering skills, Davis was eager to supply.

While Scott set the overall tenor of the newspaper's mission, Davis articulated the newspaper's conscience. In four years, he articulated an agenda of "social realism" that included appeals for racial justice in politics and economics, as well as justice before the law. He championed Negro activism, especially to compensate for social ills not remedied by white society. But he warned blacks against accepting the Depression era remedies advertised by communists.

One of Davis' central themes was that murders and lynchings would not stop until both whites and blacks were sure the authorities would punish them for breaking the law. In an early editorial, "Murders in the South," he calculated that "more than ten times as many Negroes were killed by Negroes in just three cities [Memphis, Atlanta and Birmingham] in 1931 as were lynched by whites all over America." Davis recommended two remedies to decrease the intra-racial death toll. First, he reasoned that with better education, black men and women would enjoy "a culture which is not so easily punctured by those acts which inspire people less fortunate to kill without delay." The second remedy would be "certainty of punishment"--to counter the

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[25]Davis, March 14, 1932, p. 2.

tragic reality that

> Members of our race kill each other because they know few police departments will make more than a superficial effort to find them and get a conviction, [and] if convicted the sentence is as a rule light, while popular white sentiment considers purely Negro murders nothing affecting them and the victim as one less black with which their race will have to deal.[26]

Two years later, Davis was tormented that "the murder of one Negro by another is getting to be a regular weekend feature....Such valuation of human lives is far behind the traits of an intelligent people." He advocated that blacks follow the example of Negroes in some cities who were organizing Crime Commissions to aid local government.[27]

Despite the declining numbers of reported lynchings, Davis never ceased to be haunted by the specter.[28] To begin with, he questioned the accuracy of the "recorded" statistics.[29] "The word 'recorded' is used advisedly as

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[26]"Murder in the South," Atlanta World, Jan. 15, 1932, p. 6.

[27]"What Price Murder?" Atlanta World, March 10, 1934, p. 6.

[28]In his poems of social criticism, lynching was for Davis and "for all other Negro writers of the age...the prime symbol of the failure of the American dream." Arthur P. Davis, Dark Tower, p. 123. The book excerpts from Frank Marshall Davis' "longest and most ambitious poem" on the subject--"Lynched (Symphonic Interlude for Twenty-One Selected Instruments)" from Black Man's Verse (1935):

> For him no sobs
> no anguished cries
> Naught but the mob's
> insatiable hate
> to speed him on
> to be death's mate.
> And in this way...
> and in this way
> did White get its revenge.

[29]According to statistics compiled by the Archives at Tuskegee Institute, the numbers of lynchings had been declining generally throughout the century. Statistics had begun to be collected in 1882. From then until 1939, 4,697 lynchings were recorded in the forty-eight states. More than

anybody with the mind of moron has every reason to believe that many Negroes are killed yearly in isolated parts of the South with no news of these murders ever reaching print, and that many recorded murders have all the elements of lynching."[30]

During his three years at the World, he kept readers minds focused on the horror of lynchings, of lynch mobs, and of the NAACP's campaign to pass a federal anti-lynching law. His own personal horror had occurred in Kansas when he was 5 years old, he once told an interviewer. Some white third-graders who had heard about lynching practiced on him and nearly hanged him.[31] In 1932 when Kansans lynched a white man, Davis noted cynically that "the mobbists did not play the game according to the rules of the Dixie league."[32] On his first anniversary at the World, Davis reflected that he disliked one Southern attitude in particular--"seeing the bulk of the sepia brotherhood afraid to cry out when something particularly vicious has been directed our way." At least, he noted, "In a year, I've seen Georgia skate by without a lynching."[33]

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half of them (2,598, or 55 percent) were in eight Southern states: Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Though more than a thousand whites died, far more blacks were lynched. In the eight Southern states, 90 percent of the victims were black; the national average for black victims was 73 percent. Since 1882, Georgia had been second only to Mississippi in lynchings; each state had more than 500. By 1942, the Atlanta leader of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching noted that in 1940 "Mississippi dropped out of the regular lynching states, leaving only Georgia and Florida as 'regulars.'" Jessie Daniel Ames, The Changing Character of Lynching: Review of Lynching, 1931-1941 (Atlanta: Commission on Interracial Cooperation,Inc., 1942), p. 2.

[30]"Kansas Joins," Atlanta World, April 20, 1932, p. 6.

[31]Tidwell, "Davis," Dictionary of Literary Biography, p. 60.

[32]"Kansas Joins," p. 6.

[33]Davis, "Touring the World," Feb. 17, 1932.

Davis promoted the dialogue on lynching by reprinting ideas expressed by other editorial writers and authors. Thus he excerpted from the book Brown America, in which Edwin Embree perceived a "perverted conscience in white man's violent anxiety to protect female purity"-- "an unholy sensitiveness" deriving from "his own crimes against colored women."[34] The Louisiana Weekly decried two tree lynchings of blacks in Crossett, Ark., and Warrenton, Va. (this one viewed by a mob of 1,000), echoing up on Davis' refrain that lynching was "the great American pastime." The editorialist said the "savagery and barbarism brought forth reminiscence of the feeding of the Christians to the starving lions during the Roman era."[35]

The World of course endorsed the NAACP's campaign to pass a federal antilynching law.[36] Begun in the 1920s, the campaign gained new momentum with each lynching. Sensing that there was real hope the law would be passed in 1934, Davis wrote that "it is gratifying...a move has been made to rid the country from the terrible blot of lynching, which is a hangover torture long outgrown by progressive civilizations." A direct way to stop "local sanction" of lynching would be to fire the sheriff who fails to protect his prisoners and to pay relatives of the "lynchee" $10,000.[37]

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[34]"Changing Attitude," excerpt from Edwin Embree, Brown America (New York: Viking Press, 1931), p. 218, in Atlanta World, Aug. 23, 1932, p. 6.

[35]"'Nature in the Raw,'" from the Louisiana Weekly, reprinted in the Atlanta World, Sept. 23, 1932, p. 6. Davis referred to lynching as "the peculiar American pastime," in "Kansas Joins," April 20, 1932.

[36]See Robert L. Zangrando, The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); John T. Kneebone, Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 82-83.

[37]"What the Country Knows about Lynching," Atlanta World, Jan. 8, 1934, p. 6.

While the lynching record was "shameful," Davis speculated that the victims "would mount much higher if the Negroes in many centers did not accept the inferiority theory." He seized every opportunity to disprove the theory. When collegiate track and field star Ralph Metcalfe of Georgia broke three world records and tied a fourth, Atlanta Constitution sportswriter Grantland Rice lavished "the bronze flash" with superlatives. "Members of this race," Davis wondered,

> are prone to ask just what is this inferiority thing whites say go [sic] hand in hand with a black skin?...
>
> Through all phases of human activity, whether the endeavor be physical or intellectual, history--and not propaganda--records the "inferior" race of the Negro producing champions who have as great a claim to the laurel wreath as any.[35]

What were called "legal lynchings" became his concern as he worried about the death penalties meted out to blacks. In 1932, he questioned Georgia's electrocution of a 15-year-old boy, Eddie Marsh, and the proposed execution of three other youths. Davis wondered if these executions were "any less horrible than taking a Negro from jail and stringing him from the most convenient tree."[39]

As bad as the situation was for blacks in the South during the Depression, Davis cautioned against following the line of the American Communist party. The event which focused attention on the Communists was the April 1931 trial in Scottsboro, Ala., of nine black youths charged with raping two white women. When the boys were convicted quickly, eight of them sentenced to death, the American Communist party and its legal arm, the

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[35]"'Inferior Negroes,'" Atlanta World, July 22, 1932, p. 6.

[39]"Kansas Joins," April 20, 1932.

International Labor Defense, intervened. On the surface, the Communist party had joined in the cause of racial justice for blacks. But when the Communists balked at cooperation with the NAACP, Davis, early in the game, identified the Communists as seeking to make "A-1 propaganda out of the misfortunes of nine boys."[40] That same month, Davis joined a national symposium of "Negro Editors on Communism," arguing that he had

> no fear of the rainbow brotherhood going Red in wholesale numbers--at least not until white America takes long steps in that direction. This race is slow to change. It would prefer keeping its present status, no matter how low, than fly to a system, no matter its worth, that is constantly lambasted by press and radio. Too, the Negro considers himself too dependent upon white America to take any chance of losing the crusts now thrown him. Nor is the Communistic policy of crude and noisy militancy liked by this race, for every Negro knows that what he has obtained from white men has been though diplomacy or basically intellectual campaigning.[41]

In the international arena, the World's most vigorous campaign during Davis' tenure was against the U.S. occupation of Haiti. The Marines had occupied the country in 1915 during a season of coups and civil war, and had been there 16 years before Davis began writing the World's editorials. Not surprisingly, Davis sympathized with the black republic which had lost its independence. He charged into the Haitian question with the fervor of an ideologue. He was opposed to any form of U.S. imperialism. He cited the "strong arm tactics" of the U.S. occupation forces[42] and the "paternalism"

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[40]"Reds Will Accept," Atlanta World, April 20, 1932, p. 6.

[41]"Negro Editors on Communism: A Symposium of the American Negro Press," Crisis [NAACP], April and May 1932, in Voices of a Black Nation: Political Journalism in the Harlem Renaissance, ed. by Theodore G. Vincent (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1973), pp. 206-07. On the symposium with Davis were Carl Murphy of The [Baltimore] Afro-American, P. B. Young of the Norfolk Journal and Guide, E. Washington Rhodes of the Philadelphia Tribune, Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier and Roscoe Dunjee of the Oklahoma Black Dispatch.

[42]"Haitian Revelations," Atlanta World, Feb. 17, 1932, p. 4.

of the U.S. government.[43] Also responsible for the news page displays, Davis used banner headlines to call attention to the NAACP demand for a Senate investigation of suspect Haitian loans[44] and to the Haitian Patriotic Union's appeal for a Senate inquiry into Haitian poverty and "misery."[45]

During the Haitian campaign Davis cemented his ties with the Associated Negro Press. Like most newspapers, the World did not send a correspondent to Haiti. It subscribed to the Associated Negro Press, which in 1930 sent its managing editor, Percival Prattis, whom Davis later succeeded.[46]

The World gave prominent display to the NAACP's final campaign in 1931. That December, the NAACP asked the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance to investigate the circumstances surrounding loans made to the Haitian government by New York bankers. In brief, the NAACP charged that the treaties governing the loans were "imposed upon Haiti by force" and through the collusion of the U.S.-approved president, Louis Borno. As the story in the World noted,

> It is charged that the election of President Borno in 1922 was procured by the American authorities and its is a fact that with his election the opposition of the Haitian government to demands of American authorities came to an end. The Borno government transferred the National Bank of Haiti to American interests, that is, the National City Bank and affiliates, and contracted a foreign loan.[47]

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[43]"'Paternal' America," Atlanta World, Oct. 4, 1932, p. 6.

[44]"Senate Committee Asked to Investigate Haitian Loans; NAACP Submits Memorandum to U.S. Thru Sen. Smoot," Atlanta World, Dec. 30, 1931, p. 4.

[45]"Haitian Patriotic Union Assails U.S. Reply to Leger; Misery Growing In Haiti Says Message Sent to NAACP," Atlanta World, March 9, 1932, p. 2.

[46]Hogan, Black National News Service, pp. 118-119.

[47]"Senate Committee," World, Dec. 30, 1931.

Witnesses at the Senate Finance Committee hearings in February 1932 tended to confirm the NAACP's allegations. In Atlanta, Davis responded with his first editorial on the subject, "Haitian Revelations." Given the revelations that the United States had "forced a $16,000,000 loan upon Haiti to insure continued American interference," he wrote, "so far, there is no record of our august and non-imperialistic nation having done anything about it." There seemed to be no resolve to change U.S. policy, he said, adding,

> Liberal minded organizations have long contended that the United States had used strong arm tactics to keep control of Haiti, that our nation had no business over there in the first place. Hoover has made something of a gesture of fairmindedness in Haiti, but it seems as if he, too, is not so willing to take American hands out of their affairs.[48]

The Senate hearings and news coverage, together with the 1932 presidential election, triggered the last phase of the U.S. occupation. The growing alliance of liberal U.S. organizations, Haitian groups and media in Haiti and the United States learned on Sept. 12 that the State Department and Haitian officials had negotiated a new treaty to provide for the complete "Haitianization" of the country. By the treaty, the United States would withdraw the marines by 1934 and insure "minimum intervention" in Haiti's domestic affairs.[49] Davis responded with an editorial the same day. In it, he characterized the United States as "this great, free, democratic, and non-imperialistic nation" and questioned whether anyone "could give a sound reason why they (the marines) were ever sent there in

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[48]"Haitian Revelations," Feb. 17, 1932.

[49]"U.S. to Quit Haiti in 2 Years; State Department Is Not Divulging New Treaty Details; To Oust Marines," Atlanta World, Sept. 12, 1932, p. 1.

the first place." From a sympathy for the oppressed, which most blacks in the United States could identify with, he added,

> The disgraceful seizure of a friendly, though powerless nation by this country is an act which is as disgraceful as any ever done. The United States should be glad and willing to make any kind of amends. Even withdrawing cannot repay the dusky citizens of Haiti for the injustice and the lawlessness of our marines and puppet executives who until recently were named to their positions through a travesty on voting.[50]

Davis himself was on his way out. By the time, the Marines were gone from Haiti, he was in his last weeks as managing editor. Several factors played a role in his departure, but none more so that the tug and magnetism of friends in Chicago. Davis' poetry, filed away in Atlanta, found a warm reception with Frances Norton Manning, a Chicago white woman. "She was so impressed by my 'Chicago's Congo,'" Davis recalled years later, "that she got in touch with me in Atlanta, encouraged me to write more poetry, and found a publisher, the Black Cat Press, for my first two books."[51] The Associated Negro Press was also interested in Davis' journalistic talents, seasoned by three years at the helm of the daily.

Davis' departure was unheralded. Typical of journalism in general, his name was simply removed from the masthead after Sept. 1, 1934. In an oblique reference to Davis, the World soon afterwards referred to the fact that "it has been fortunate to secure the services of able editorial writers, so prolific as to do the unprecedented thing of preparing new editorials of the creative writing nature every day....In this alone the World has rendered a racial service that should rebound [sic] to the everlasting good of our

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[50]"On the Way Out," Atlanta World, Sept. 12, 1932, p. 6.

[51]Tidwell, "Interview with Davis," p. 107.

people and country."[52]

Frank Marshall Davis held the position of managing editor of the Associated Negro Press until 1947. In 1948, when his fourth and last book of poems was published, he "abandoned a promising career as journalist and poet for the comparative quiescence of Hawaii."[53] There, thousands of miles from the black protest movement, he contributed columns to the Honolulu Record and continued to write poetry which, he says, "shows more maturity but no noticeable increase in sensitivity over my previous work."[54] In 25 years, he faded into relative obscurity. In the 1970s, literary critic Stephen Henderson and poet-publisher Dudley Randall "rediscovered" Davis as "the long lost father of modern Black poetry" and arranged for his tour of black colleges as the "mystery poet."[55] On July 26, 1987, at the age of 81, he died of a massive heart attack.

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[52]"He [W. A.Scott II] Took Up A Challenge," Atlanta World, Sept. 16, 1934, p. 4.

[53]Tidwell, "Frank Marshall Davis," Dictionary of Literary Biography, p. 60.

[54]Tidwell, Interview with Frank Marshall Davis, p. 108.

[55]Ibid.